

# RESTORATION UPDATE

A newsletter on the Salton Sea Restoration Project

Salton Sea Authority

April 2004

[www.saltonsea.ca.gov](http://www.saltonsea.ca.gov)

## A Conversation with California State Senator Denise Ducheny

**Q: When did you first become aware of and involved with the Salton Sea?**

A: I was born and raised in Southern California, so I have been aware of the Sea for a long time. In addition, my overall interest in the Colorado River, the Sea of Cortez and cross-border water issues with the New River revolves around the Sea.

**Q: Your leadership was vital in ensuring that the Salton Sea was addressed as a part of the Quantification Settlement Agreement (QSA) negotiations. What were you trying to accomplish with the legislation you sponsored and has that intention translated into reality?**

A: I think what we were partly trying to do in the long run – and kind of using the QSA as the leverage to do it – was to have the state step up to the plate in the same way the federal government

had done under Sonny Bono's leadership.

Historically, we didn't have the state making the same level of commitment to the Salton Sea that the federal government had demonstrated with the Salton Sea Restoration Act.

The legislation that we authored was a lot about saying the Salton Sea is an important state priority and a statewide environmental resource, just like the Bay Delta and Lake Tahoe. I think my legislation accomplished that.

The other part of the legislation was to advance the notion that since the federal government study didn't get to a preferred alternative, the state would take the lead. The Salton Sea Advisory Committee – which has federal participation, local participation and state participation – was created to bring everybody to the table at one time to hear the same



information and try to move the discussion forward. I think one of the frustrating things about what has been going on with the Sea over the last several years is that there has been a new theory or a new study every year. We never seemed to get all of the scientists together to argue it out in front of a group of folks that can build fences around the pieces that made sense.

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The other part of the idea was to have people be part of making that occur, so that we have a deadline, we actually have to identify a preferred alternative that we can move forward with.

**Q: With the state programmatic EIR process underway and the Salton Sea Authority poised to identify a preferred alternative to kick off its own project level EIR things could get very confusing. Could there be two Salton Sea environmental reviews going on at the same time?**

A. All of the Salton Sea Authority member agencies are members of the state task force charged with looking at all these things and engaging in the EIR process which the state is required to perform.

The state has to do the EIR because of the Quantification Settlement Agreement and because of the responsibilities and liability for Salton Sea environmental issues that the state accepted as part of the QSA agreements. I would hope that we do not get into a duplication of effort. That is why all of the partners were put on this task force. We do not want to re-invent the wheel. I will make sure that does not happen.

There has already been a lot of work

done. I am hopeful that we avoid getting into a situation where people are on two different tracks at the same time. That would not benefit the Sea.

**Q: There has been a lot of press supporting local leadership for the restoration effort. How important do you think local involvement and leadership is to the effort?**

A: Every local entity that has a stake in the Salton Sea is a member of the Salton Sea Advisory Committee. This includes members of the Salton Sea Authority, the local government, Tribal governments, and representatives of the agricultural, recreational and environmental communities. The state is convening the task force because the state is responsible for the CEQA process, must do the EIR, and has a statutory mandate to come up with a preferred alternative.

Unfortunately, we are in a position where the state has to figure out how to fund these projects, as well as convince the federal government to provide some of that funding. Neither Congresswoman Bono nor I can go to our colleagues and ask for huge amounts of money unless we are clear about where we are going. That is what was so frustrating about the fact that

we didn't get a preferred alternative from the federal government in the early 2000s when we were supposed to.

We need some consensus on that, so we're in a position to say, "here's the goal." We need local participation in order to set the goals and to look at things like: how do you live with less water in the Sea, how do we stabilize the shoreline, how do we ensure the right salinity and deal with the issues of the biology of the sea to ensure there are fish to bring birds?

The long-term vision that I have, and that I believe is a vision most local community people share, is one that allows for better economic development in the area to the benefit of the Coachella and Imperial Valleys by bringing more recreational users back to the Sea. We need to do some good things in the communities along the Salton Sea in order to have the recreational resource used to a greater degree.

So, clearly local participation is critical to that vision and critical to understanding the actual impacts of proposals.

**Q: Some local constituents are concerned that state funding from the QSA would be spent away from the Salton Sea on**

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## the Colorado River Delta or even in Mexico, is that possible?

A: I know that people are concerned about that. When you are considering environmental impacts you have to consider the entire ecosystem. The Salton Sea is part of an ecosystem that includes the lower Colorado River and south to the Mexican Delta.

I don't think anybody contemplates spending the Quantification Settlement money, which was set aside for the Sea, on projects away from the Sea. Certainly some of the studies may have to include analysis of those regions and how they inter-relate with each other. Because it's the Pacific

Flyway, you can't ignore the Delta and the Sea or the connection between them.

## Q: What do you see is the biggest challenge ahead for the state restoration efforts?

A: Getting dollars. This task force needs to get together on the first critical piece - getting a broad consensus on a preferred alternative. They need to understand the relative feasibility of the different phases, and the cost of doing these things. The next challenge is to convince people statewide, whether it's through bond funding or legislatively, to implement that vision.

## Q: What would you like to see happen next?

A: Next is having the task force sift

through all of the different studies and build some consensus around the environmental issues that need to be addressed.

I think that the first step for that group is to define the goal. What are the goals here and what do we want to see? This is where the local participation is so important. What are the goals in terms of restoration of wildlife and shoreline stability and things that will help the communities be able to build economic vitality around the Sea? What techniques or what proposals will actually advance these goals? How can these be phased-in, and at what cost? Then the trick is to go out and find the money.

# Authority Proposes Cooperation with State and Federal Agencies

The Salton Sea Authority is proposing that local, state and federal agencies enter into formal agreements to collaborate on Salton Sea restoration efforts. The Authority sent drafts of a proposed agreement to state and federal officials this week.

"We will be reviewing the final restoration alternatives report and considering action to approve a Preferred

Restoration Alternative at our board meeting on April 22. We feel a joint work program is the best way implement the wishes of Congress and to get the project moving," said Authority board Chairman Andy Horne, a member of the Imperial Irrigation District Board of Directors.

Five Southern California Congressional  
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## MEETINGS SCHEDULE

### Board of Directors

April 22, 10am  
VFW, Desert Shores

### Technical Advisory Meeting

April 22, 10am  
VFW, Desert Shores

  
Salton Sea Authority

### Plaza La Quinta

78-401 Highway 111, Suite T  
La Quinta, CA 92253  
[www.saltonsea.ca.gov](http://www.saltonsea.ca.gov)



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members led by Congresswoman Mary Bono and including Congressmen Ken Calvert, Bob Filner, Duncan Hunter and Jerry Lewis as well as Senator Barbara Boxer recently wrote to ask Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, the Department of Interior and the Salton Sea Authority to “ensure that local, state and federal players work together in Salton Sea Restoration Planning and implementation.” Together the Congressional members

comprise the Salton Sea Congressional Task Force.

In the bipartisan letter, sent April 6, the members expressed concern that there has not been the local, state and federal cooperation that will be necessary to implement a restoration plan.

“We should not be working at cross purposes with or duplicating efforts toward any aspect of Salton Sea Restoration,” they stated. “Rather, we should pursue ways to align new activities, such as the

state’s environmental process, with those already well underway, such as the Authority’s work on a preferred restoration project.”

They added: “We have already been through a programmatic study of the Salton Sea (and) the Salton Sea cannot afford the time for another study.”

“We couldn’t agree more,” Horne stated. “The Authority stands ready to work with all of our partners to get this project moving. We are ready to go.”



The white pelican is one of 400 different bird species that rely on the habitat around the Salton Sea.